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Spiritan

Africa – “the Catholic future writ large”

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“Do this in memory of me”

The quiet fire of Neil McNeil

Pope Francis: a vision ... an agenda

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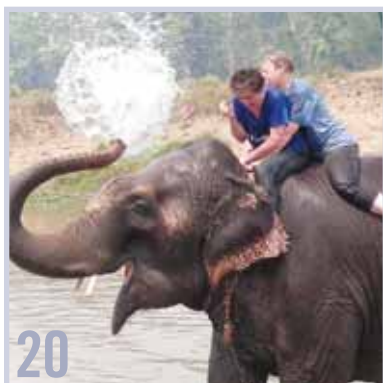
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Words made flesh

Pat Fitzpatrick CSSp

St Francis of Assisi is quoted as having said, “Preach the gospel at all times; if necessary, use words.”

Nonetheless, words abound — mission statements, documents, goals and objectives, minutes of meetings, position papers, textbooks, lesson plans, homilies ... you name them.

We have a Liturgy of the Word at every Mass — always two, sometimes three readings. If accompanied by a homily, this liturgy takes up more time than the rest of the Mass. I don’t underrate it. I spend a lot of time working at it when I have to give the homily.

I recall the answer Polonius got when he asked Hamlet: “What do you read, my lord?” Answer: “Words, words, words.” Change the question to “What do you hear?” and ask it of the congregation at a Sunday Mass and you might well get the same three-word answer.

The introduction to John’s gospel reminds us: “The word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” The word was made flesh — that’s why we have a Liturgy of the Word at every Mass. Not to hear it and promptly forget it, but to hear it from a homilist who can flesh it out and make it come alive for us.

Mark’s Gospel

This year our Sunday readings come from Mark’s gospel. It contains no infancy narratives, no stories about life in Nazareth. Mark begins with Jesus selecting his team. He calls two sets of brothers: Simon and Andrew, James and John. Where did he find them? At work — four fishermen in their boats, Not on retreat, not in the synagogue — at work. “The human and the holy go hand in hand”: in the office, at the board table, on the shore, in the kitchen, perhaps in church.

Having selected two sets of brothers as his opening picks, Jesus passes by the local tax collector’s booth, looks at the man seated there and says to him, “Follow me.”

Jesus meets future disciples at their daily work. Instead of waiting for this tax collector to volunteer to become his follower, he takes the initiative and picks Levi — a most unlikely choice. Four fishermen and then a tax collector — a motley crew. Levi, in fact, was probably excommunicated from the synagogue because he was working for the Romans. I’m tempted to say, “Things haven’t changed all that much. How many of those in church would pick *me*? How many of *them* would I pick?”

Jesus never turned down an invitation to dinner. So the next time we meet him he’s in Levi’s house. Who else was

there? Levi’s friends — “tax collectors and sinners” — and the four fishermen. A mixed bag — something resembling a typical parish. The holier-than-thou lookers-on were scandalized: “That Jesus of Nazareth sits down to table with that riff-raff and eats with them? And he calls himself God’s Messenger!” They wouldn’t have been seen dead with those sinners around Levi’s table.

“You shun them. I join them.”

Jesus defends his actions and himself. “Just as the sick need a doctor, sinners need me. I’m a mobile healer and the dining table is often my surgery. You dismiss them. I associate with them. You shun them. I join them. You insist they change before you have anything to do with them. I mingle with them

Jesus never turned down an invitation to dinner.

and invite them to change. You insist that repentance must precede forgiveness. I believe that it is through forgiveness and table fellowship that they’ll repent. I go to them. I don’t wait for them to come to me. Sinners? — maybe they are. Which of you is without sin? Table fellowship — eating and drinking together — that’s my way of calling sinners. As they hang out with me they’ll get the hang of what I’m about. I can wait.”

The lyrics of Nancy Bodsworth’s song for this Year of Faith in the Catholic Schools of Ontario have a lot to say to us: “We walk by faith and not by sight, Standing tall, rooted in Christ, Blooming where we are planted, Succeeding where we are sown. Growing in faith together — Never alone.”

Our walking along with our preaching, our talking along with our listening, our questioning along with our answering, our laughing along with our caring — long before Shakespeare, Jesus took to heart Hamlet’s advice to the actors: “Suit the action to the word, the word to the action.”

Words, yes — when necessary. But always presence and welcome and the human touch. The Angelus prayer is a daily reminder: “The word became flesh and dwelt among us.” ■

A Vision ...

For the bishops of Brazil

Church — reconciler and restorer

Pope Francis retold the story of the Madonna of Aparecida as a parable of the Latin American church. Tired fishermen, who had experienced failure in a dilapidated boat with old, torn nets, found a broken statue that needed to be mended. “In Aparecida, from the beginning, God’s message was one of restoring what was broken, reuniting what had been divided.”

Our way of speaking

Francis admitted that “perhaps we have reduced our way of speaking about mystery to rational explanations, but for ordinary people mystery enters through the heart ... God’s way is through enticement, through allure.”

The message should be kept simple. “At times we lose people because they don’t understand what we are saying, because we have forgotten the language of simplicity and imported an intellectualism foreign to our people.”

Church of Emmaus

Using the Emmaus story from Luke’s gospel, Francis talked to the bishops about people who have left the church because they now think that the church — their Jerusalem — can no longer offer them anything meaningful and important.

“Perhaps the church appeared too weak, perhaps too distant from their needs, perhaps too poor to respond to their concerns, perhaps too cold, perhaps too caught up with itself, perhaps a prisoner of its own rigid formulas. Perhaps the

world seems to have made the church a relic of the past, unfit for new questions. Perhaps the church could speak to people in their infancy but not to those come of age.”

The church we need

We need a church unafraid of going forth into their night. We need a church capable of meeting people on their way. We need a church capable of entering into their conversation. We need a church able to dialogue with those disciples who, having left Jerusalem behind, are wandering aimlessly, alone, with their own disappointment, disillusioned by a Christianity now considered barren, fruitless soil, incapable of generating meaning.

Are we still a church capable of warming hearts? A church capable of leading people back to Jerusalem? Of bringing them home? Jerusalem is where our roots are: Scripture, catechesis, sacraments, community, friendship with the Lord, Mary and the apostles ... Are we still able to speak of these roots in a way that will revive a sense of wonder at their beauty?

We need a church capable of rediscovering the maternal womb of mercy. Without mercy we have little chance nowadays of becoming part of a world of wounded persons in need of understanding, forgiveness, love. Let us not reduce the involvement of women in the church, but instead promote their active role in the church community. By losing women, the church risks becoming sterile.

He is challenging

Bob Brehl

When he tells young people to take their faith to the streets and stir things up, to be revolutionaries, Pope Francis is challenging.

When he tells bishops to communicate with touch, presence, closeness — and not just with documents and orders — he is challenging.

When he asks priests to avoid driving

fancy cars or living a luxurious lifestyle, he is challenging.

When he calls on all of us to be more than social workers, but witnesses to Jesus with a mission for us in our work and our lives to transform society for justice, he is challenging.

Another famous Jesuit has a favourite saying that if you truly want to be a fol-

lower of Christ, you must be prepared to look good on wood.

That’s pretty radical sounding, but Francis’ message to us is not all that different. And he practises what he preaches, although it feels more like he practises what he teaches us.

The Catholic Register, Toronto, August 18, 2013



Our Lady of Aparecida Principal Patron of Brazil

The statue was originally found by three fishermen who prayed to Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception that God would grant them a good catch to honour the presence in their town in 1717 of the governor of Sao Paulo and Minas Gerais. After casting their nets, they first dragged up a headless statue of Mary, then the head itself, after which they netted plenty of fish. After cleaning the statue, they found it was a black sculpture of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception. It was less than three feet tall and must have been under water for years.

The statue is now dark brown, covered by a dark blue robe of richly embroidered thick cloth with golden clasps. The crown was added in 1904. Over the years, many miracles have been attributed to the dark-skinned apparition of Our Lady of Aparecida.

Today's Basilica, begun in 1955, is capable of holding up to 45,000 people. It is currently the largest Marian church in the world, second only to St Peter's Basilica. An official holiday on October 12 celebrates Our Lady of Aparecida as the patroness of Brazil.

Pope Francis celebrated Mass at the shrine on July 24, 2013.

... An Agenda

For the bishops of Latin America

A self-evaluation

Do we see to it that our work, and that of our priests, is more pastoral than administrative?

Do we promote opportunities and possibilities to manifest God's mercy?

Do we make the lay faithful sharers in the mission?

Do diocesan and parish councils, whether pastoral or financial, provide real opportunities for laypeople to participate in pastoral consultation, organization and planning?

Do we give the laity the freedom to continue discerning, in a way befitting their growth as disciples, the mission which the Lord has entrusted to them? Do we support them and accompany them, overcoming the temptation to manipulate them or infantilize them?

The centre is Jesus Christ, who calls us and sends us forth. When the church makes herself the centre, she becomes merely functional, and slowly but surely turns into a kind of NGO.

Bishops must be

- pastors, close to people, fathers and brothers, and gentle, patient and merciful.
- men who love poverty, both interior poverty as freedom before the Lord, and exterior poverty as simplicity and austerity of life.
- men who do not think and behave like princes.
- men who are not ambitious, who are married to one church without having their eyes on another.
- men capable of watching over the flock entrusted to them and protecting everything that keeps it together, guarding their people out of concern for the dangers which could threaten them, but above all instilling hope so that light will shine in people's hearts.
- men capable of supporting with love and patience God's dealings with his people.

The Bishop has to be among his people in three ways:

- *in front of them*, pointing the way
- *among them*, keeping them together and preventing them from being scattered
- *behind them*, ensuring that no one is left behind, but also, and primarily, that the flock itself can sniff out new paths.

The quiet fire of Neil McNeil

Ted Schmidt

In 1958 the Spiritans opened a high school in the east end of Toronto. They had good reason to name it Neil McNeil. Here is his forgotten story.

They asked about Jesus, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:45), the presumption being that this rural backwater had nothing to offer. A similar question could have been asked about arguably the greatest bishop Canada has ever seen, Neil McNeil, who hailed from a small hamlet named Hillsborough (Mabou) in Inverness County, Cape Breton.

The McNeils, like many on Cape Breton, were Scots-Irish. Neil McNeil, the bishop's great-grandfather hailed from a small island in the Hebrides named Barra. His mother's family hailed from Kilkenny, Ireland. Neil's father Malcolm and mother Ellen had eleven children. The eldest, born in 1851, was the future bishop.

*"There's nothing as hot
as a slow burning fire."*

The Skydiggers (1999)

In reading about McNeil's early years one is struck by a number of things, the first being his high intelligence and close family relationships. Among those were his cousins, the Meaghers, with whom Neil lived for a while. Here he was mentored by Nicholas, a younger brother of his mother. A life-long friendship developed between Neil and Nicholas who in time became a Justice of Canada's Supreme Court. These people had brains to burn and integrity to match.

On to higher studies

Because he was by nature quiet, Neil was thought to be not academically inclined, so his father groomed him to follow him into his blacksmith forge. Dan, Neil's more extroverted brother, was considered brighter and hence slated to go to university. The local teacher intervened. Amazed at Neil's extraordinary mathematical ability, he told Mr. McNeil that

"he should be driven out of Mabou" if he did not send Neil on to higher studies.

Neil McNeil entered St. Francis Xavier University (St FX) in September 1869. His natural ability was evident to all and in 1873 he was sent to Rome to study for the priesthood.

Two observations present themselves here. The first was Neil McNeil's deep grounding in social reality. His work at the forge servicing a general population schooled him in the sacred work of craftsmanship. It also made him abundantly aware of community: "Even as a young man in Hillsborough I worked in my father's forge ... even then the individualistic side of religion didn't satisfy me." From the earliest time, Neil McNeil was a justice man.

Before returning to become a professor at St FX, Neil, ordained at twenty-eight in 1879, was sent to the University at Marseilles to study math and astronomy. He became fluent in several languages.

Championing the rights of the poor

At St FX Dr. McNeil, as he was now styled, not only taught every subject but he helped construct the buildings on the growing campus. He also became rector of the seminary and started a local newspaper, the *Aurora*, where the plight of poor fishermen ("fast in the talons of voracious vultures") was first noticed and railed against. The *Aurora* also championed the rights of miners. It was probably in these pages that he ran afoul of the local bishop and in 1891 the former dean of the seminary and professor was sent off as a curate to an Acadian community, Arichat, at the foot of Cape Breton Island.

Good soldier that he was, Neil enjoyed his four years in





Photo courtesy of the Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto

Acadia but it became obvious that the Canadian church needed his abundant talents as a bishop-builder on the west coast of Newfoundland. For 15 years he used his construction skills to literally help build schools, convents and rectories. His letters of the time are stunning testimonies to his tireless and versatile work. By 1900 he had worked himself into exhaustion and needed a year abroad to recover. In 1901 he returned as bishop to Newfoundland's west coast where he continued on much as before. Then out of the blue, in 1910 he was sent to the other coast of Canada: Vancouver!

By this time McNeil's extraordinary talent had become abundantly clear to Rome and while Vancouver had its missionary challenges, it was the heart of English-speaking Canada, Toronto, which needed his leadership.

Archbishop of Toronto

Education became McNeil's major focus. St. Augustine's seminary had just begun. For the next 22 years Bishop McNeil not only turned the new seminary into Canada's prime educator

of priests, but he became a passionate champion of Catholic schools which were routinely discriminated against. Another great challenge was to provide religious services for the immigrants streaming into Ontario.

Next on his agenda was finding a progressive editor for the Catholic newspaper, the *Canadian Register*. When fellow Cape Bretoner and social reformer, Fr. Jimmy Tompkins, was in England looking for educational ideas, Bishop McNeil asked him to look out "for a man who can come here to Toronto and promote social studies in the interest of the working class." In this, McNeil was similar to Pope Francis whose commitment to the poor and workers is now well-known. Tompkins found just the man, a brilliant working class journalist named Henry Somerville, who became a self-educated

*"Holy Communion is a banquet
not an individual lunch,
a banquet designed
for the common benefit
of all who partake."*

Archbishop Neil McNeil (1931)

factory worker at the age of thirteen. He turned the *Canadian Register* into a forum for progressive causes. On their regular Saturday walks together Somerville and McNeil shared ideas. Biographer George Boyle writes about his friend Somerville, "He didn't mind the silences as some did."

Neil McNeil's 22 years in Toronto were incredibly effective. His passion for Catholic education, his love of the poor, his promotion of a dynamic Christianity, broadly ecumenical and centred on justice, his love and care for the immigrants were legendary. At his funeral on May 29, 1934, 15,000 people crowded around St. Michael's Cathedral to pay homage. No Catholic bishop was ever so mourned, loved and feted by all sectors of society.

The quiet, taciturn lad from Hillsborough (Mabou), noted for his "eloquent and evocative silences", let his totally engaged life speak for itself. Those silences were fueled by the intense inner flame we call the Holy Spirit. Neil McNeil's entire life was "a slow burning fire" which regularly burst forth in personal kindness and the building up of God's reign. His 1929 statement could have been easily uttered by the present pope: "There's no room in the 20th century for a cloistered bishop." ■

Ted Schmidt taught at Neil McNeil for 18 years.



“Do this in memory of me”

Anthony Gittins CSSp

In the narrow sense we speak of Eucharist with a capital E: the Mass. But Jesus speaks of much more than that. So we can speak of small-e eucharist in the broader sense of living our daily lives as sacrament, as a sign that points to Jesus, and as an act of thanksgiving. These keep the memory of Jesus alive. And we can do that under four headings: Encounter, Table Fellowship, Foot Washing and Boundary Crossing. Then we will know how to “go and do this in memory of him.”

Encounter

We start with Jesus’ whole life in ministry as Encounter. Viktor Frankl, therapist and survivor of Auschwitz, said, “To love you must encounter.” You simply cannot love unless you encounter. You can’t love people in general — there are no people in general, only particular people, specific people.

Jesus didn’t love “the poor” — that’s an abstraction, a category and you can’t love an abstraction. Jesus loved actual flesh-and-blood people, those he encountered one by one day after day.

So let me examine myself. Who do I encounter? How genuinely interested am I in the people I meet? Who do I avoid? What is the quality or superficiality of my encounters?

How willing am I to seek those I no longer encounter or to go out of my way to encounter people I have not yet met? If I measure myself by the measure of Jesus then I fall far, far short.

At the Last Supper imagine Jesus saying, “Do you remember when we encountered the little children and you got indignant and wanted to get rid of them? Or the five thousand hungry people — not even counting the women and the children — and you asked me to send them away because you

“To love you must encounter.”

— Victor Frankl

could not be bothered? What about my encounter with the woman at the well? You were scandalized because I was talking with a woman, for God’s sake. And what about the woman who was bleeding? Or the woman who came with ointment and anointed me? Do you remember those occasions, those encounters?”

Then, maybe, at last, in their acute embarrassment the disciples learned something. Encounter is one way for us to “Do THIS in memory of Jesus.”

Table fellowship

The table serves symbolically as a gathering point so that, around it, the family or the community can be “re-membered”. Jesus had sat down at table with people all through his life.

So he wanted to do this with his friends one final time the night before he died.

St Luke’s gospel, in particular, can be read as a table-hopping gospel. In it Jesus is either at the table, on his way to the table or coming from the table. And it’s largely his table-fellowship that gets him killed. He deliberately seeks out and eats with all the wrong people, in all

St Luke’s gospel, in particular, can be read as a table-hopping gospel. In it Jesus is either at the table, on his way to the table or coming from the table.

the wrong places, at all the wrong times. His table fellowship is radically inclusive. And so, one final time, he said to his close friends and to each of us, “Do THIS in memory of me.”

So — who do I eat with and who do I avoid? Do I cultivate high table friends or, like Jesus, do I make friends in low places? Who do I like to be seen with? Who do I never associate with?

Enemies can be turned into friends when they break bread and share wine. Think of Churchill and Stalin, Nixon and Mao, Gorbachev and Regan and all other world leaders who try to be civil during a state banquet. And think of Jesus eating in the house of Simon the leper, or with prostitutes and sinners, or with Zacchaeus, the despised tax collector, and so many nameless others. Accused of eating with tax collectors and sinners, he said, “Yes ... and so should you! Do THIS in memory of me.”

And yet, as we do this in his name, even at the Eucharistic table, we are a divided, separated, segregated community. We choose at our Eucharists not to eat with certain people who are different or enemies, until they change and become like us.

Table fellowship is also horizontal ministry because everyone is on the same level. Table fellowship indicates that no one is superior and





no one is inferior. This is the community of equals that Jesus is building. So again he says to you and me, “Do THIS in memory of me.”

Foot washing

Jesus is very insistent on this. The master becomes the servant, the first becomes the last, the superior becomes the inferior. It’s a deeply poignant action. We can see the mutuality, we can see the balance and the dignity involved. Whoever has the position of superior, the one-up person in charge, must also undertake to be the inferior, the one-down person in service. As Jesus said to his disciples, “As I have done, so you must do. Do THIS in memory of me.”

Mothers and nurses and caregivers of all kinds know foot-washing day in and day out. But some of the rest of us have never washed a person’s feet, never bandaged a wound, never assisted a sick person. Where is the foot-washing in our lives?

Boundary crossing

Again, this is an absolute requirement for anyone who follows the way of Jesus. The boundaries that Jesus crosses are not international frontiers. He doesn’t cross oceans and he travels only as far as his feet will take him. The boundaries mark the edge of our own comfort zone — often just beyond the edge of our own fingertips. There’s always a temptation to stay within our own comfort zone rather than to encounter those who are separated from us by gender or social class or religion or privilege or deprivation.

Jesus lived in a world in which people like us tended to stay with their own kind and avoid unnecessary contamination. But just beyond your fingertips you can meet the other — which is exactly what Jesus came to do: to reach out and to embrace. And you can only embrace the other if you open your arms. A fist has to turn into an open hand. Yet that’s what Jesus does as he crosses the boundaries of separation to create a new community of inclusion.

A major reason for the astonishing and rapid growth of the early church is that those early Christians took very, very seriously the command to love one’s neighbour as oneself — but with a twist. One’s neighbour was understood to include two groups of people: those I already know and those I have not yet met.

So people who needed help would find Christians, seeking them out and offering help — shockingly counter-cultural.

Four hundred years earlier Plato had written about the perfect society. In his Republic everyone lived in harmony. But the poor and the needy and the naked and the homeless and the criminals were nowhere to be seen. They were removed, left outside, beyond the city walls. Plato declared that anyone who was interested in such human refuse was an idiot. Anyone who cared about the poor and the needy must be mad. His was the ultimate gated community.

So Christians were evidently bad because Jesus taught that they must reach out to the poor and the needy because these outcasts were specially loved by God. And many people thought he was soft in the head. But he insisted: “They will know that you are my disciples if you love one another as I have loved you.”

So the little bands in the early Christian community grew by breaking through their own boundaries and reaching out to embrace the forgotten, the despised and the condemned. At the Last Supper when Jesus was reminding the apostles what he had been doing every single day of his life he told them, “Go, reach out, look for the poor and needy, look for the forgotten and the silenced, look for anyone who is excluded by skin or religion or gender or class or incivility and reach out. Turn that closed fist into an open hand and embrace the sisters and the brothers you’ve never even met. You’ve seen me do it. Remember. Go and do THIS in memory of me.”

And so, where shall we do it? We just start from where we are: just reach out a hand or move a foot forward. Then we will find ourselves at the margin, at the boundary, at the meeting place where it all begins.

At the end of Mass the celebrant says, “Go — Ite, missa est — Go, you are sent.” You have received Eucharist. Now you are Eucharist. You have become what you have received. And today’s Eucharist has to last you for a whole week, so go out and be Eucharist until next week. Then come back and do it all over again. You are gathered around the table at your

Where is the foot-washing in our lives?

Eucharist in order to be scattered around your neighbourhoods. You feed on the body of Christ, yet you should go out more hungry than when you came in. Hungrier and thirstier for God’s justice because now the Eucharist has put an edge on your appetite. Use this spiritual nourishment so that you can continue to do this — all of it — in memory of Jesus.

Wherever you go, go and do Eucharist, Do it in memory of Jesus. In that way you will never forget him. You will never forget who he is for you and you will always remember who you are. And never become separated or lost or “dismembered.” ■

I give you Eucharist

Bishop Christian Hollings, Anthony Gittins CSSp

He was old and tired, pushing his cart down the alley, a dumpster diver up to his armpits in someone’s garbage.

I wanted to tell him about Eucharist, but the look in his eyes, the despair on his face — was it fear or madness? The shame of needing someone else’s garbage told me to just forget it. Instead I smiled and said “Hi” and gave him a couple of dollars — Eucharist.

She lived alone, daughter murdered, husband dead, health gone. She talked incessantly and with amazing and tedious detail — at you but not with you. Endless words spewed out, the only proof that she was still alive. So I tried to listen — and gave her Eucharist.

They were sitting on the sidewalk at the street corner. Human garbage by some people’s reckoning. Not respectable. Not the right ethnicity though this land was theirs before others took it from them. She asked for a handout. He sat looking at the ground. I had the day off and plenty of time. So we went for a meal at a fast food joint. They ordered what they wanted. I paid the bill — Eucharist.

Good God, when will we learn? You can’t just talk about Eucharist. You can’t philosophize or dogmatize about it. You can only do it — sometimes laughing, sometimes crying, sometimes almost unconsciously, and sometimes when you’re singing out loud. It can happen in the depth of pain or in deep peace, or in

abject shame. It doesn’t have to be planned. And it’s never deserved.

Eucharist can be found when you look into the eyes of another person. It can be sensed in a smile or felt in a reconciling or healing embrace. It may whisper in the leaves on a summer’s day or in the voice of someone who just needs to talk. And you may whisper it in someone’s ear or hold it in your arms as a gesture of love. Eucharist is not complicated, but it surely is the great mystery of human life.

“I give you my word, my hand, my time, my attention, I give you the very best of myself. I give you my life. I give you Eucharist,” says Jesus. “Do this yourself every one of you, everywhere, anywhere. And when you do, remember me. Remember me.”

Out of Africa – a revitalized church

Daniel Abba CSSp

Provincial of the Nigeria North-West Spiritan Province

The Spiritan Congregation has grown a lot in Nigeria. Before 2010, when we were divided into four Provinces, Nigeria had become the largest single Province in the Congregation. The four Provinces continue to grow year by year and Nigeria South East is now the largest Spiritan Province worldwide. We thank God for our many vocations even when our continual growth challenges us to look for ways to cope with such increase.

I grew up in a religious family that talked about church and mission and also had a love for the priesthood and religious life as a way of serving God and humanity.

All four Provinces work together, especially in the areas of Formation and Mission. Many Nigerian Spiritans work outside their country too, in Africa, North and South America, and Europe.

In the Nigerian church there exists an attraction to the priesthood and religious life. I want to believe that Christianity has found a home in Africa, and especially in Nigeria. I grew up in a religious family that talked about church and mission and also had a love for the priesthood and religious life as a way of serving God and humanity. It was part of an evolution — people wanted to donate themselves to serve God and humanity through the priesthood and religious life. I became more and more convinced that I wanted to join them in this endeavour.

The church in Canada and Nigeria

It's difficult to know why there isn't the same attraction towards the church in North America. I appreciate the church

in Canada — it's much more alive than the church in Europe. I've spent time in Western Canada and it's amazing when you go to church there and compare it to some parts of Europe. In Western Canada you see a lot of young people coming to church — and yet they represent only a small percentage of the Catholics in that area.

In Nigeria it's more of a total family thing. There the family has a big role to play in the life of an individual. You don't want to go outside the family until you "find your foot on the ground." Part of finding your foot on the ground and part of family culture is to worship, to pray. Young people have inherited that from their family and want to keep to it even when they leave home.

God has a hand in it

We know that God has created us. We need to worship God. Whatever we are today, whatever we'll be tomorrow, God has a hand in it. Even the wealthiest of our people, even the most intelligent among them, still give glory to God for life. We may be able to do a lot of things, but we know that it is God who gives us the ability to do those things. That brings the church very much into our culture. That is why God is so much alive in the different African cultures.

In our culture when one has done something great and people say, "Thank you, we're happy for you", the common response is, "It is the Lord's doing. Thanks be to God. It's not me, it's God." People always give credit to God for what they are able to do. It is one way that God is fully alive in that culture.

Even in the African secular world God has a role to play. If you find a job, you thank God. If you pass your exams, you thank God. Even though you know that you have to study in order to pass your exams, you still believe that the greater part of the work is done by God. Yes, we have to do our part so

"The more we know about Africa the more we'll know about the Catholic future writ large."

John Allen, National Catholic Reporter

that God can achieve what he intends to achieve through us. We are part of that plan. That's the way we look at it.

Nigerian Spiritans

Nigerian Spiritans are primarily missionaries in Africa. A small but significant number go overseas, but the majority work in Africa. There is a very small number in Canada and the USA. But Nigerian Spiritans are to be found in many of the European Spiritan Provinces. The majority are engaged in parish work, but there are some in other ministries also — quite a number in the British Province work with youth and refugees, especially in Manchester. There are also Spiritans working in prison ministry.

In Africa this is also the case — appointed to a parish, a Spiritan might find himself involved in a variety of ministries: youth, prison ministry, teaching, schools. But the base is the parish. The African church, based in the parish, is more or less a family affair. Even though you may be in school or someplace else, you come from a family. And this family is regularly present in the parish. As a priest you meet people in church and then you meet them again in the regular ministries you are engaged in.

Our African Spiritans in Germany, Holland, Ireland, Belgium are very surprised when they come to church: they don't see many people there. They find it difficult when many of the people they meet in other places and on other occasions are not interested in church. On the other hand, among those who don't go to church they find a very strong devotion — including among young people. There are still many people who are very Christian even if they are no longer churchgoers.

Challenges to African Spiritans

The dwindling number of new Spiritans, especially in Europe, and the dwindling financial support from Europe for African Spiritans present two ongoing challenges.

Europe has been our strength ever since 1703. It still remains our financial strength. But the older people become, the more there are challenges for the home Provinces. These, in turn, affect the entire Congregation — financial resources that might have been available for younger Provinces are now needed to take care of the elderly in Europe. New areas and new vocations in Africa, Asia, South America can no longer depend on Europe to the same extent for financial support.

Speaking as an African, there is a challenge of integration. Even though we are an international Congregation, we tend to nationalize it according to our country of origin e.g. Ireland, France, Germany, Nigeria. So when a Province says that it is dying out, it is inclined to think that means the whole Congregation is dying out. Yes, we may be dying out in Europe — but we are more than Europe. After all we are a Catholic Church and a Catholic Congregation — not just a European Congregation.

We hope that we will shift to that more inclusive mentality. Our new General Council — whose members come from

Nigerian Spiritans in Canada



Daniel Abba

Obinna Ifeanyi

Oliver Iwuchukwu

David Okenyi

Ireland, Quebec, France, Nigeria, Tanzania, Portugal — renews our hope that we will remain catholic in our outlook.

Africa's contribution towards a revitalized church

What will Africa bring to the Catholic world? How will the church benefit from being more African?

Once a culture exports missionaries, it exports itself too — maybe not completely. For the African to go to Europe or North or South America and make Africans of those people would be to repeat the mistake we ourselves frown upon.

When I sit with Canadians and listen to them I find there is not much difference between their way of life and our way of life. "My family, my children and my grandchildren" are what

There are still many people who are very Christian even if they are no longer churchgoers.

mark a life in Africa. So when I see a man or woman in Canada whose interest is in their children or grandchildren — I admire that a lot. This is something that we have in common.

Young people in Europe and North America don't seem to want to go to church because they feel there's no life there. They speak of it as dead. But the charismatic character of the Nigerian or African church, if allowed to come back, not in an extreme way (we have had extreme charismatic practices which the church has frowned at) might enable other churches elsewhere to rekindle some vibrant life. Young people want to feel alive. They don't want to come and sit down and listen. They want to sing, to clap their hands, to dance, to feel happy. They want to speak out. Africa has that at the moment. Nigeria especially has a demonstrative aspect to its worship — we sing, we clap hands, we dance. We don't keep it in, we express it and that expression entices people to participate.

You pray that way, and you go out of church feeling you've done something. My feeling is that a similar approach would bring back life to European and North American churches too. If something of that is welcomed and encouraged, the parishes will be able to get back their young people and so bring the church itself back to life.

Our educational ministry in Nigeria

We have so many local diocesan priests that we don't need missionaries. But every church needs to have a religious congregation in its community.

When the missionaries came, one of the things that they brought along with them, and which the people warmly embraced, was education. During the civil war in Nigeria, when the schools were taken away from the church, a lot of missionaries were expelled. Today's Nigerian public school system has run-down schools — mainly due to corruption.

Now that we have the opportunity to build schools again, education is becoming a very important part of our ministry. We feel that the education we have in Nigeria today is not right, not

strong enough. The four Spiritan Provinces in Nigeria are trying to invest in schools and to evangelize through the schools.

We want to channel our resources into education. Out of approximately 170 million people, Nigeria has a teeming young population that loves to study. We need personnel to reach out to as many of them as we can.

Christians in the north find themselves very scattered. Two of our four Spiritan Provinces are there, but our numbers are still very small. We want to be with our people. We want to walk with them through their sufferings and the killings inflicted on them. Both Muslims and Christians have suffered from the current situation. Being with and walking with both groups is a big challenge in Nigeria today. ■

Religions in Canada – 2011 Census

Roman Catholics, roughly 12,726,900 or 28.5% of overall immigrants, were the largest Christian group, although their numbers decreased from 41.3% before 1971 to 22.5% between 2001-2011. Catholics make up 38.7% of the total population of Canada. United Church members, about 2,007,600, were the second largest group of Christians.

Just over 22.1 million people, two-thirds of Canada's population of 34,482,779, reported that they were affiliated with a Christian religion.

Quebec remained Canada's most Catholic province at 74.7% of the population. 45% of Canada's Roman Catholics were in Quebec and 31% in Ontario.

1 out of 5 people in Canada's population were foreign-born. In Toronto 2 out of 5 Catholics were immigrants whereas in the rest of Canada the proportion of Catholics to total population was 1 in 10. In Toronto Mass is offered in 36 languages every Sunday. Filipino immigrants account for the majority of Mass-goers.

Orthodox believers represent 1.7% of Canada's population.

Christians still make up the largest share of recent immigrants. 41.7% of them came between 2001-2005 and 47.5% between 2006-2011.

Slightly over 1,000,000 individuals identified themselves as Muslims, representing 3.2% of the total population. The largest share of Muslim immigrants between 2006-2011 came from Pakistan.

Hindus represented 1.5%, Sikhs 1.4%, Buddhists 1.1% and Jews 1.0% of the population. Recent Hindu and Sikh immigrants came mainly from India. Most Buddhists came from China. China was also the top source country for immigrants with no religious affiliation.

Just over 64,900 — 4.5% of the Aboriginal population or .2% of the population as a whole — reported affiliation with traditional Aboriginal spirituality.

24% of Canadians had no religious affiliation — an increase from 16.5% in 2001 and 12% in 1991.

Church attendance

Large numbers of people ... haven't shut the door on religion. 51% of the population are receptive to greater involvement if they can find it worthwhile.

It's not the job of the sheep to find the shepherds, but the shepherds to find the sheep ...

Immigration will remain a boon to the Catholic Church in Canada ...

Most Catholics actually wander back on their own every once in a while. They show up in amazing regularity ... Even when Roman Catholics think they have lost people they still have them.

Those who need to attend weekly services out of a sense of obligation will now tend to go if they feel their minds are uplifted, otherwise they won't bother.

*Reginald Bibby
University of Lethbridge Sociologist
(Talk at St Paul University, Ottawa, April 2013)*

Harvest grains

Pat Fitzpatrick CSSp

Sower God sent a seed to feed the peoples of the earth. It ripened in the womb of Myriam of Nazareth and saw the light of day in Bethlehem, the House of Bread. Its cradle was a manger — a feeding trough for animals.

The seed fell freely on the beaten paths and fertile earth of Galilee. But it could not break and enter dry and stony ground. Hardened hearts excluded it, cluttered living choked it. Those whose lives were chock-a-block had room for nothing more.

But where the soil was soft, the seed could nestle, die, take root and yield abundant harvest grains.

In Galilee the teacher took the bread they brought, said grace, broke and gave it to his friends: “Give the hungry something to eat.” They fed five thousand hillside guests. Twelve hampers were collected, leftovers from the picnic — abundance now where once was want.

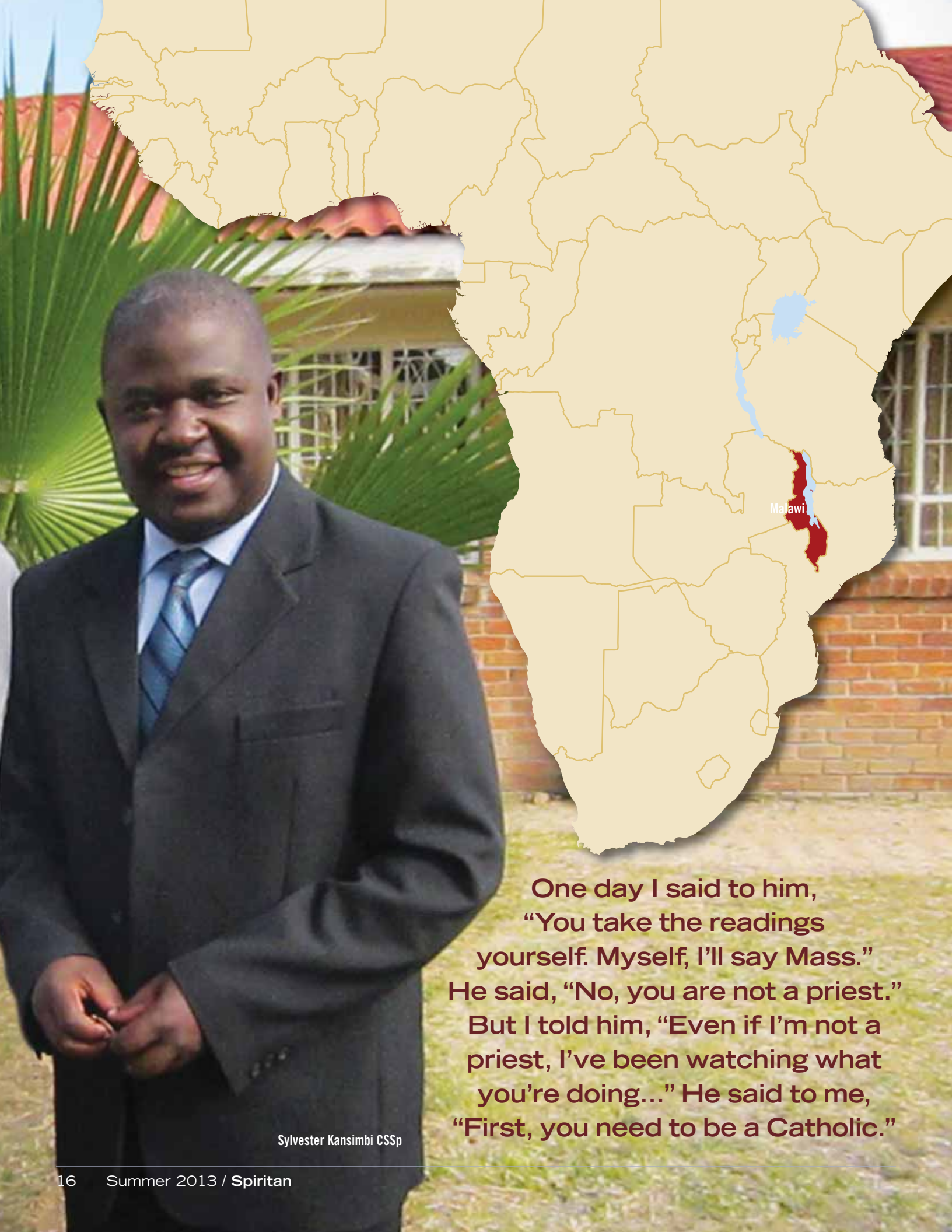
In Bethany, against the custom of her people, Martha entertained her rabbi friend. She toiled to make the welcome real — the food, the drinks, the setting, the preparations and the

cooking, the kitchen heat, the timing of the courses. At his feet, where a rabbi’s male disciples normally reserved their seats, Mary kept him company — a woman friend. Host and guest sat and talked, smiled and laughed together. Martha’s presence was delayed till all three sat together at the table. Meal is more than menu. Feast is more than food.

In Jerusalem the supper menu was unleavened bread and choicest wine. He took the bread, said grace, broke and gave it to them: “My body given for you. Do this in memory of me.”

En route to Emmaus a stranger bore the brunt of two disciples’ dead and buried hopes. Their damned-up disappointment sluiced slowly through their words as they re-lived a field of dreams become a desert of discouragement. At their evening meal, the stranger gave himself away. They knew him when he took the bread, said grace, broke and gave it to them.

Still the Sower scatters seed to feed the peoples of the earth: with us evermore in harvest grains and the breaking of the bread. ■



One day I said to him,
“You take the readings
yourself. Myself, I’ll say Mass.”
He said, “No, you are not a priest.”
But I told him, “Even if I’m not a
priest, I’ve been watching what
you’re doing...” He said to me,
“First, you need to be a Catholic.”

Sylvester Kansimbi CSSp

From traditional religion to **Spiritan** priest

Sylvester Kansimbi CSSp
Seminary Director

I come from a family that was not Catholic, from a village where there were only two or three Catholics. The majority lived our traditional religion's way of life. It was not a systematic approach, but we knew God. There was a Catholic school about 20 kilometres from my home, run by the Marist Brothers, and I was privileged to go there. I had not been baptized, but I really loved this school. I stayed there until I was seventeen.

Mass was celebrated twice a week in the school and everybody had to go to it. I didn't know the Mass then, but I went to it. The priest saying that Mass was a Spiritan, Fr Conor Kennedy — a very good man, well-known by everyone. Everyone appreciated the work he was doing. What I knew of him was that he was a good priest. In addition to saying Mass in the school, he was very involved in helping the refugees from Mozambique.

When he came to the village crowds of people flocked to him to ask for different things — food, clothing, money. Slowly I too got to know him. I had no interest in the church, but I went to visit him whenever he was there — to see what he was doing.

I was in Forms 1, 2 and 3 in high school, but I was still not a Catholic. One day he asked me, "Do you have a Bible?" Then he gave me the Bible and I started to read it. In school Bible Knowledge was one of our courses.

"You take the readings yourself. Myself, I'll say Mass."

Fr Kennedy said Mass every day, even on his holidays. He always asked me to take the first reading. Then, one day I said to him, "You take the readings yourself. Myself, I'll say Mass." He said, "No, you are not a priest." But I told him, "Even if I'm not a priest, I've been watching what you're doing and I could do that. I will follow the book." He said to me, "First, you need to be a Catholic."

He saw I was interested and he started helping me. I told my parents, "This is my intention — to join Fr Kennedy's

church." My mother was okay. "It's up to you," she said. But my father was against it.

"He wants to be a priest, but he isn't baptized"

During Form 4 Fr Kennedy said I could be baptized at the school, but he would prefer to have the baptism in my village. So he arranged that with my parish priest. The other baptisms at the parish for that year had already taken place. However, the priest arranged it with Fr Kennedy to be in the parish on a particular day. They discussed together my desire to be a priest. They talked about my baptism and who should baptize me. Then Fr Kennedy said, "Here we are, the three of us ... He wants to be a priest, but he isn't baptized ... The three of us together ... we're the church. Let's baptize him right now. We don't need to go to the church." The parish priest said to Fr Kennedy, "You should baptize him."

It was a simple ritual — I think five minutes. There was no chrism. I was asked to choose my Christian name. I wanted to keep my own name but the parish priest said, "That's a pagan name." Then Fr Kennedy said, "Today is the 31st of December — the feast of Saint Sylvester. So you should be called Sylvester."



Sylvester Kansimbi CSSp (back row, fourth from left) and Locky Flanagan CSSp with seminarians.

“I’m thinking I should join you.”

Now that I was baptized we began to talk about me becoming a priest. I got a job and earned some money. But more and more I felt drawn to become a priest and join Fr Kennedy. In the meantime I met a girl at work and I asked myself, “Should I marry her?” But I was more drawn to be a priest. Fr Kennedy and I met again. He asked me, “What are you thinking?” I told him, “I’m thinking I should join you.” He told me to share it with my parents.

So I went back home and my father said, “No. You have no background. You have no roots. If you had been a Catholic for years I would understand. I don’t think you would make it. In the family line, mine and your mother’s, nobody has gone that way. We are not Catholics at all.” My mother said, “Let him go. If he fails he’ll come back.”



Conor
Kennedy
CSSp

Eventually I left my work. I began to meet other guys who were thinking the same way — John Dimba and John Guwa. The Spiritan formation houses were in Tanzania and South Africa. I went to South Africa to try and see if I could make it.

Life in the seminary

The seminary life was totally different from what I had seen Fr Kennedy live. I was used to praying once a day. But in the seminary it was prayer, prayer, prayer, morning, noon and night. Was that going to be my way of life as a priest? It was too much. I liked the learning part, but it was not easy for me to get used to the prayer part.

There were also tensions between whites and blacks in the seminary. For me it was okay, but South African blacks found it very difficult to be with whites. One by one many blacks left. During the second year I got used to the white/black combinations. Later I studied theology in Tangaza, Kenya with a much larger and more international group. It was so enriching. I began to understand how international our Spiritan congregation was.

More than sacramental ministry

Fr Kennedy was different from other priests — they said Mass and heard Confessions, but he was involved with people —

poor people and refugees. His work as a priest went beyond sacramental ministry.

People were attracted to him — not only Catholics but many other people too. His work with the poor was what attracted me to him in the first place. He helped people, he brought people together. I wished to join him especially in his refugee work. I learned that refugee work was not the only kind of Spiritan work. There was youth work and other work. I began to understand that this was religious life. It would be a new way of life for me.

Eventually my parents were slowly attracted to what I was living. People were telling them, “Your son has joined the Catholic Church and you have not.” So my mother began to take catechism classes and within two years she was baptized. In 1993, when my father was sick, he asked to be baptized and soon after his baptism he died.

Bit by bit my friends and other people from the village joined the Catholic Church. Now the whole village is Catholic.

“If [Fr Kennedy] had died in Malawi he would have had a state funeral.” — Minister of Justice, Malawi

I am looking forward to opening the first small Catholic Church in my village this December or maybe next year. Bit by bit my village has been transformed.

Getting ordained

But back to my ordination. I was to be ordained in my village. Fr Shay Foley, our District Superior, had to run up and down to find a Bishop to fit into our timetable for that ordination. Several bishops were not available. Finally a Montfort bishop was available: “You are Holy Ghost Fathers,” he said. “We are relatives. Our founders — Claude Poullart des Places and Grignon de Montfort — were friends. But I don’t ordain people outside my own cathedral.”

Fr Foley pleaded that it would be good for my people that I be ordained at home. But eventually he had to give in. I was ordained 200 kms from home. About twenty people from my parish travelled to my Ordination. But I was able to say my first Mass at home in my own village.

Losing Fr Kennedy

I regret that Fr Kennedy died in South Africa. He was a father to so many people in Malawi. When I told the Minister of Justice that he had died, the Minister replied, “If he had died in Malawi he would have had a state funeral.”

So many people in Malawi were so sad not only when he died, but when they heard he had been cremated and his ashes had been taken to Ireland. They found that hard to understand. He meant so much to the people. ■

The moulding of a missionary

Bernard Kelly CSSp



Son of a Jewish rabbi, Francis Libermann was born in Saverne, Alsace, France. His mother died when he was eleven. He did not leave his hometown until he was twenty. All his early schooling was supervised by his father, whose great desire was to have a son a rabbi like himself. When Francis finally left home to go to the Talmudic school at Metz, his brothers had already gone in different directions.

He was aware that only he could bring to fulfillment his fathers' cherished dream.

But Francis soon experienced serious difficulties of faith, and after four years of struggle he was converted to Catholicism. A sensitive fidelity to his Jewish faith had led him to a belief in Christ. He moved to Paris and at the age of 25, entered the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice, Paris to study for the priesthood. Aware that this news would break his father's heart, he tried to keep it from him.

"Betrayal!"

But one day at the seminary he received a letter. His aging father had heard the news and had written a letter of bitter reproach. In his eyes Francis' behaviour was a betrayal of family and faith. Because of his great affection for his father, Francis felt his heart torn apart. He broke down and wept, all the time repeating, "I am a Christian!" God sometimes asks his chosen ones to go against the people they love the most: "God gave me the grace to resist my father," he wrote. Francis had tried in every way to avoid this confrontation with his father. Confrontation brings suffering. But it also puts an end to pretense.

Confrontation carries the risk of an outbreak of violence, of open warfare. Almost always it bodes ill. Yet we are forced to recognize that some confrontation is inevitable. Within both family and church, confrontation is never far away.

Epilepsy

When Francis suffered his first epileptic seizure a year after receiving his father's letter, it was the beginning of twelve years of obscurity. His hopes of ordination to the priesthood were dashed, but he refused to be downcast. Because of his illness, no planning for the future was possible, everything was tentative. Constantly vulnerable, he accepted his nervous fragility and came to terms with uncertainty. There were some

dark moments — once he was tempted to suicide as he crossed a bridge over the Seine in Paris. He tells us that he overcame this temptation by turning his attention to Christ, the living witness to the Father's love.

Vocation

In retrospect, these years would better be described as "the making of an apostle." They were prologue to a creative outburst that took everyone by surprise. Founder of a missionary congregation, its superior general, renowned spiritual director, confidant of government officials ... Libermann had discovered his missionary vocation to the most abandoned. He would revitalize the African missions.

During the period of hectic activity that followed, he found unexpected resources of energy in his love of God and his compassion for others. His energy was soon to be stilled — he died at the age of 50 — but its source remains the lifeblood of Spiritans today. His simple lifestyle and missionary zeal still sound an echo in the hearts of many men and women. ■

Prayer in honour of Francis Libermann

O loving Father,
In sickness and in loneliness
Let your peace come upon me
As the morning dew.
Help me as you helped Francis Libermann
Never to doubt your love.

O Christ, my fellow traveler,
Suffering servant
Acquainted with infirmity,
Help me as you helped Francis Libermann
To turn my attention away from myself
To you.

O gentle Spirit,
Secret of the world's meaning,
Help me as you helped Francis Libermann
To seek your hand
And your design
In my present situation.

A return to my second home – Nepal

VICS volunteer **Mary Martin**, who spent 9 years in Nepal (2000-2009), shares some experiences from her return visit in 2013.

It was great to be “home” once again, to awake to the sounds of the cuckoos, to walk to 6:30 Mass at St. Mary’s and be welcomed so enthusiastically by the St. Mary’s sisters, so many of whom had been praying for me as I journeyed through my cancer. They could not get enough of just looking at me, so healthy and full of life again. How they rejoiced! They showed me photos of myself which they had in their prayer books, as they prayed each morning for me. It was very humbling to know how much they cared.

Friends from Canada joined me through my journey. Three of them had never been to Nepal, and two had never been to a developing country, so it was fun to once again see Nepal through the eyes of newcomers. At first they seemed pretty overwhelmed, but they quickly adapted to the traffic (the “death seat” in the front of taxis was a hot favourite) and to life in this corner of Asia.

One morning we got up at 4 a.m. and set off for Kopan nunnery. There we joined 370 Buddhist nuns in their morning prayer. It was really neat to meet and pray with these women who had prayed for me after my cancer diagnosis. So much of my visit to Nepal seemed to be meeting old friends and rejoicing with them over my good health. Gift!

The seven-hour drive south to Chitwan gave our group an opportunity to see how life is lived outside the Kathmandu

valley — the traffic on the highway, the teashops, the towns we passed through. Riding (and washing) elephants was the highlight of our Chitwan visit, though walking through the jungle and finding a rhino was also pretty exciting. We saw loads of crocodiles as we drifted down the river in a dugout canoe.

The trek

We spent a half day back in Kathmandu once again visiting the bank machines (it took several attempts, as often they were not working or had run out of money, or there was no electricity, or ...) and doing a bit of shopping in preparation for our trek.

We set off about 7 a.m. to drive north of Kathmandu — a very winding road with steep cliff drops and hairpin curves. The road was mostly paved, and we had a good driver, and so arrived at Hotel Peaceful by about 3 p.m. There we were met by Mukhiya, our sirdar and good friend, and our four porters. We were greeted with prayer scarves and a welcome drink of seabuckthorn juice. Some tried the showers (attached loos!) but got only cold water.

By 7:30 the next morning we were off, following the river up and up and down and up through bamboo forest and across suspension bridges strewn with prayer flags. The bridges were actually very high quality, and the need for prayer flags did not seem as acute as some bridges I had been on.

After a day or two we all settled into our rhythms. By Day 3 we were up to about 11,000 feet and the weather had cooled right down. By Day 4 we were in the snow, though it really



Mary Martin (far left) is joined by friends from Canada on her return visit to Nepal.





Riding (and washing) elephants;
prayer flags along the route;
rhodos in bloom;
Himal snow-capped peaks;
navigating steep stone steps;
KUSMS physio faculty.

wasn't all that cold. It was so nice to be ambling once more in my much loved Himal, and to gaze up at the snow-capped peaks as we walked past walls of carved prayer stones and waving prayer flags. We stayed two nights in Kyangjin Gomba — the chocolate cake in its bakery was to die for. Great cappuccino too!

Altogether we spent eight days trekking. It was hard work, but just so good to be up in the Himal once again. And the rhodos! We walked through hours of rhododendron forests, with the trees arching over us, laden with red and white and pale pink

blossoms. Those rhodos kept me going up many a stone step!

I had forgotten just how much work it can be. The last time I did this trek was in 1987 — I had not given much thought to what it might mean to be 26 years older!

When we arrived back at Hotel Peaceful we learned how to make hot water come (ask the manager to turn it on!) So we showered and had a celebratory beer.

Later in my trip I met with the physio faculty of the Physiotherapy School of Kathmandu University School of Medical Sciences (KUSMS), the programme I had helped to start in 2002. It was so special to find them engaged and enthused about their work, and so competent. The assistant dean spoke very highly of them: "Whenever I give them a task they do it perfectly." He is keen to look at starting a Masters Programme in Physiotherapy — such a far cry from the diploma course I got started in 2002. It continues to be the only Physiotherapy training in the country. What a thrill to see it thriving.

I had a wonderful four weeks away. How blessed I am! ■

Join VICS and you are in it for life

Once a VICS volunteer, always a VICS volunteer. That's why I get to come to the annual reunions. I act as an "eye" for VICS in Africa. I meet current volunteers, see projects that could be undertaken by future volunteers and in general keep an eye on today's volunteers and their work, especially the projects in Nigeria.

My first contact with VICS was in South Africa. I was struck by the wonderful work the volunteers were doing as they donated their lives to the service of the needy there and across the world. You can't but be touched by their kind of sacrifice — it makes a very powerful statement. It is almost like becoming a priest or a Spiritan — abandoning your own roots so as to go out and proclaim the good news. That resonates with me from my Spiritan background. The volunteers accept what we accept — to be uprooted from our own cultures, to go someplace else; not just to go and teach, but to listen so as to be able to work with them. I really appreciate that approach. I have come to admire how people can give themselves so much to other people. This really touches me. Thank God VICS is a Spiritan product. — *Daniel Abba CSSp*

A quotable Pope

Sometimes these dismal Christian faces have more in common with pickled peppers than the joy of having a beautiful life.

Don't bottle up your joy — if you do, you risk becoming nostalgic.

Christians who are afraid to build bridges and prefer to build walls are Christians not sure of their faith, not sure of Jesus.

Pope Francis



Even though I clutch my blanket and growl when the alarm rings,
Thank you, Lord, that I can hear. There are many who are deaf.

Even though I keep my eyes closed against the morning light as long as possible,
Thank you Lord that I can see. There are many who are blind.

Even though I huddle in my bed and put off rising,
Thank you Lord that I have the strength to rise. There are many who are bed-ridden.

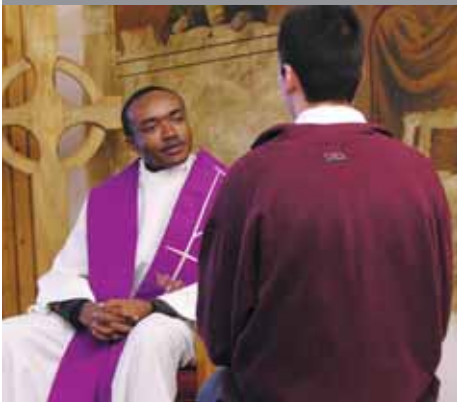
Even though the first hour of my day is hectic — when socks are lost, toast is burned, tempers are short and my children are so loud,
Thank you, Lord, for my family. There are many who are lonely.

Even though our breakfast table never looks like the pictures in magazines and the menu is at times unbalanced,
Thank you Lord for the food we have. Many are hungry.

Even though the routine of my job is often monotonous,
Thank you Lord for the opportunity to work. There are many who have no job.

Even though I grumble and bemoan my fate from day to day and wish my circumstances were not so modest,
Thank you Lord for life.

Author unknown



The task now for the Church is to learn the lesson that most clergy have learned: the Church must do all in its power not to come between people and their God.

Fr Allan Hilliard

Before you speak to me about your religion, first show it to me in how you treat other people. Before you tell me how much you love your God, show me how much you love all His children.

Corey Book



Sister Margaret Anne Laffey, 1943–2013

Lay Spiritan Associate 1977–1990

The Spiritans knew her as Margaret — an active and valued Lay Spiritan from 1977-1990. Then, rather late in life, after years in Public Service, she entered Religious Life. As a Sister of the Good Shepherd, she continued her work in Social Service and Justice and Peace causes: Executive Director of Rose of Sharon Services for young mothers and of Rosalie Hall, working in pastoral care and prison ministry in Vancouver and then for three years in Winnipeg with Youth at Risk. Returning to Toronto in 2008 due to health issues, Margaret continued her work with the Good Shepherd Sisters as a Communications Coordinator. Margaret was an only child, yet her relationship with her



best friend Mary Killackey was that of sisters. They spent 43 years supporting each other through education, health issues, marriages, births and deaths.

Wherever she went Sister Margaret Anne made lifelong friendships. She always brought out the best in those whose lives she touched. Her vivacious sense of humour, her gentle soul and big hugs were legendary and will always be remembered. She never missed an opportunity to tell those in her life how special they were to her. Margaret was a rare gift from God. We will miss her greatly and never forget her.

Adapted from Good Shepherd Sisters Death Notice, Toronto Star

Anniversaries of Ordination

25 years a Priest

40 years a Priest

50 years a Priest



Paul McAuley



Fernando Pinto



Pat Fitzpatrick

TransCanada Province downsizes

The Winter 2013 edition of *Spiritans* drew attention to the change of address, after seventeen years, of Laval House from 121 Victoria Park Avenue to 15 Truman Road in Toronto. A second change of address will take place on October 1, 2013: the Provincial Offices will move to **34 Collingsgrove Road, Scarborough, M1E 3S4** (off Kingston Road east of Lawrence Avenue).



Father Michal Jurkowski

Congratulations to Fr Michal on becoming a Canadian citizen.

Born in Poland, he joined the Spiritans there and as a seminarian worked for some time in England among the homeless and those coping with drug addictions. Ordained a priest on June 12, 2004, he was appointed to the TransCanada Spiritan Province and on August 5, 2005 he became Associate Pastor in St Joseph's Parish, Highland Creek on the eastern boundary of Scarborough. On August 21, 2012 he was appointed Pastor of St Joseph's where he has overseen the recent changes to the parish offices and rectory.

Return Address:
Spiritan
34 Collingsgrove Road
Scarborough, Ontario
CANADA M1E 3S4
P.M.#40050389



The Cupped Hand – a Place of Growth

I hold in my hands a small wounded bird.

If I close my hand tight — the bird will be crushed and die.

If I open my hand fully — the bird will try to flutter its wings and will fall and die.

If I cup my hand around it — neither totally open nor totally closed — healing can take place.

— *Jean Vanier*